

HOUSE BILL NO. 164

INTRODUCED BY C. VINCENT

BY REQUEST OF THE FIRE SUPPRESSION COMMITTEE

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT AUTHORIZING THE FIRE SUPPRESSION COMMITTEE FOR A SECOND BIENNIUM; PRESCRIBING THE MEMBERSHIP AND DUTIES OF THE FIRE SUPPRESSION COMMITTEE; APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THE OPERATION OF THE COMMITTEE; AND PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE."

WHEREAS, the Legislature created the Fire Suppression Committee during the September 2007 special legislative session, which was convened to appropriate the state's share of costs of the extreme 2007 wildland fire season; and

WHEREAS, the Fire Suppression Committee was charged with studying fire and land management policies and strategies with an eye toward examining ways to mitigate costs to state taxpayers; and

WHEREAS, the Fire Suppression Committee met at least monthly for a year to learn about the various aspects of wildland fire suppression; forest and grassland management; the wildland-urban interface; how fire costs are calculated; and how local, state, and federal agencies handle jurisdictional issues and policy differences; and

WHEREAS, after soliciting and receiving extensive public comment and traveling to seven communities around the state, the Fire Suppression Committee developed detailed predictions, conclusions, and recommendations for action aimed at private citizens and local, state, and federal wildland fire agencies, all of which are provided in the committee's final report to the Legislature; and

WHEREAS, in spite of the fact that during the summer of 2008, the state did not experience numerous large-scale wildland fires or the extreme fire behavior of previous seasons, the Fire Suppression Committee agrees with those who have predicted that wildland fire seasons will only increase in duration, severity, and costs and its members believe that unless certain measures are taken, firefighters will be injured, communities will be destroyed, and hundreds of people will be killed; and

WHEREAS, members of the Fire Suppression Committee encourage the Legislature to authorize the committee's existence for another biennium to continue its important work and, most importantly, to track each of the recommendations it has made and gauge the progress of implementation of legislation and budget

1 authority approved by the 61st Legislature.

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3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

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5 **NEW SECTION. Section 1. Fire suppression committee authorized.** (1) There is a fire suppression
6 committee established for the biennium beginning July 1, 2009, and ending June 31, 2011, to monitor the results
7 of the work completed by the committee established by Chapter 1, Special Laws of September, 2007, and to
8 track the implementation of its recommendations.

9 (2) The committee consists of six senators appointed by the committee on committees and six
10 representatives appointed by the speaker of the house. Three senators and three representatives must be
11 members of the majority party, and three senators and three representatives must be members of the minority
12 party.

13 (3) The legislative services division shall provide staff assistance to the committee, and the committee
14 may receive staff assistance from the legislative fiscal division and the legislative audit division.

15 (4) The study must include:

16 (a) an analysis of whether and how each of the recommendations made by the committee in its 2008
17 report to the 61st legislature has been implemented and which of those recommendations should be amended
18 or reinforced;

19 (b) an examination of additional needs of local and state fire suppression entities;

20 (c) further investigation of state and federal forest management policies, how those policies may
21 contribute to an increased number of wildfires, greater safety risk to firefighters and the public, and compromised
22 effectiveness of fire suppression efforts and avenues the legislature may pursue to affect changes in those
23 policies; and

24 (d) any other aspect of wildland fire suppression and land management that the committee determines
25 to be appropriate.

26 (5) The fire suppression committee shall complete the study by September 15, 2010, and report to the
27 62nd legislature its findings and recommendations, including any recommendations for legislation.

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29 **NEW SECTION. Section 2. Appropriation.** There is appropriated from the state general fund to the
30 legislative services division \$50,000 for the purpose of conducting the study provided for in [section 1].

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2 NEW SECTION. **Section 3. Effective date.** [This act] is effective on passage and approval.

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